Background

In 1995 Save the Children USA (SC/US) began working in partnership with the UNHCR and the Education Liaison Office of the Commissioner of Afghan Refugees to provide access to quality education for Afghans living in the Refugee Villages (RVs) of rural Balochistan. Since 1995, overall enrolments in primary education have increased from 6,047 children to 14,087 children (as of March 1999). Girls' participation, which accounted for 647 enrolments in 1995, has now increased to 5,143—a 694% improvement.

Strategies to achieve the increase in enrolment of girls have included introducing double shifts in schools, setting up mixed schools, recruiting qualified female teachers, introducing a more appropriate curriculum and setting up Home-based Schools for girls. Home-based schooling is one of the alternative 'delivery channels' that have been explored and developed to increase access to education, both in Afghanistan and in the refugee context. In the SC/US, Balochistan, refugee context the schools have been established to increase access specifically for girls, They are referred to in this paper, and by SC/US staff, as Home-based Girls' Schools (HBGS).

The establishment of HBGS in 1997 reflected the serious concern in SC/US to increase access to education for girls in the Afghan RVs. Beginning with five schools, numbers have grown quickly and the project now comprises 54 schools in five of the six districts where Afghan refugees live.

Establishing a Home Based Girls' School

The first step in establishing a HBGS is to identify and select a teacher. Enthusiasm, provision of an adequately sized room in her home, and ability to pass a test based on the GTZ curriculum are the basis for selection. Once a teacher is selected she, together with SC/US staff, identifies up to 25 girls/adolescents who can enter into the school. The girls are enrolled and the teacher is trained accordingly by SC/US. In creating the schools, SC/US staff are careful to establish schools in areas far from existing girls' and mixed primary schools. It is important the HBGS be seen *not as an alternative* to the primary schools, but *as a supplement* meeting the very specific needs of Afghan girls in *purdah*.

Basic Information on the Schools

- GTZ–BEFARe grade 1-3 curriculum is used in all the schools as it is used in the 45 RV primary schools also operated by SC/US.

- The subjects taught are:
  - Mathematics
  - Pashto Language
  - Islamiyat/Religion

- The classes are not multigrade as it was felt that teachers who lack formal training would have difficulty with the methodology required. The students, therefore, start together and remain together through out except where they fail to achieve acceptable grades in the annual examinations (see below).

- Classes run daily (Monday-Friday) for three hours (either in the morning or the afternoon depending on teacher and student availability). There is a recess held halfway through the session during which the students can play and socialize with one another.

- As with SC/US's other RV schools, stationary and textbooks are provided to the students on an annual basis.

- The schools are also supplied with a blackboard and chalk, floor coverings, and a water cooler. Unlike the other RV schools, SC/US does not provide any construction in the existing premises. The classes take place in a room of the home of the teacher —chosen by the teacher and her family.

- Training is often done on an individual basis initially since the schools start at any time. However, teachers are encouraged to attend further training workshops in camp clusters at a home chosen by the teachers themselves. Those teachers who do not have the mobility required to attend group training workshops are trained on an individual basis but receive lower stipends.

- Teachers are observed monthly by SC/US field staff and support is regularly given—further training is given when necessary on subjects ranging from teaching methodology to record keeping systems.

- Students are examined quarterly and annually. Quarterly marks the completion of a textbook and annually marks the completion of the grade. Students who do not pass the annual exams with adequate grades are asked to study that grade a second time in another HBGS nearby if available.

- HBGS normally have a month long winter vacation except in Chagai district which also has a summer vacation.

- The teaching methodology used follows that prescribed in the GTZ teachers' guide. The HBGS training and support team has noted teachers' enthusiasm for the method, genuine desire to help the students, and work in preparing their lessons. The majority of HBGS teachers appear to be less constrained by traditional conceptions of the teacher-student relationship than many better trained Afghan teachers who work in a more formal education setting.

- *Monitoring*: HBGS are monitored and supported by a five member team consisting of four Field Education Supervisors and one Project Officer who are based in SC/US's Quetta Office.

- *Stipend*: As of the end of 1999, teachers were getting a stipend of PKRs 1,050 per month. In order to encourage teachers to attend collective training workshops and teachers who have attended group training in their camp/district receive a stipend of PKRs 1,200 per month. The stipend is under review.

- *Edible Oil*: The HBGS are part of the World Food Program's edible oil program through which each student receives a 5 kg can of edible oil every two months as an incentive to encourage girls to participate in education. SC/US strictly monitors girls' attendance in these schools to ensure that only girls who have attended school for 22 days of the month in question receive oil. The teachers are given two 5 kg cans of oil each as a supplement to their income.

- *Informal Women's Committees*: A pilot committee was created in Muslim Bagh district to make frequent visits to the schools, help teachers as requested, and promote female education in the area. They also visit absent students' homes to try to find out the reasons for the absences and encourage girls to continue. Many of these committee members are graduates of SC/US's Non-Formal Education Centers for Women, which they also support in a similar fashion. The success of this committee has encouraged SC/US to create further committees in other districts; however, to date these are still being developed.

Statistics on the Schools

Gathering comprehensive statistics on the HBGS is an ongoing process. The current available information is as follows:

Teaçher's level of Education

Qualification Level	Number of HBGS (Total 54)
Home Schooling*	15
NFE Center Graduate	3
Grade 3	1
Grade 4	4
Grade 5	3
Grade 6	3
Grade 7	5
Grade 8	4
Grade 9	3
Grade 10	2
Grade 11	0
Grade 12	10
Grade 14 **	1

***Home Schooling Graduates** are girls who were taught at home by their families (normally fathers, brothers, or other male family members).

****Grade 14** is the terminology used for those who complete a standard two-year university course leading to a teaching certificate post grade 12 graduation in Afghanistan.

In addition to their qualifications, the vast majority of HBGS teachers are quite young and inexperienced women, often not much older then some of their students.

Age Group	Number of teachers (Total 54)
14-20 Years	26
21-25 Years	8
26-30 Years	8
31-35 Years	7
35-40 Years	2

Despite the low, formal education qualifications of the teachers in general, SC/US is very pleased with the quality of the teaching conducted by the vast majority of HBGS teachers. As in many cultures, communities in the RVs expect good teachers to be formally educated to a high level. However, most of the HBGS teachers have not had such an education and perhaps that is why so many of them strive to attain greater heights

and work conscientiously to win students' and trainers' approval. Using the GTZ curriculum with its step-by-step teachers' guide has been a great help. Unlike many qualified and experienced teachers who find it challenging to change rigid methods, the HBGS teachers' work hard to improve themselves and their methods. Many ask for extra work to improve their content knowledge and most try to follow the trainers' advice and the GTZ books' advice word for word. Their dedication is apparent in the encouraging and co-operative way in which they work with their students.

Working as an HBGS teacher is one of the few ways women, especially young women, can make use of their literacy skills and general knowledge in the Refugee Villages. As such, SC/US provides these women with an important employment opportunity by making education for girls meaningful and relevant.

Profile of the Pupils

The HBGS at present (October 1999) are limited to grades 1-3 with 21 schools presently conducting grade 3, 24 conducting grade 2, and 9 conducting grade 1.

The students' age structure as per September 1999 attendance was as follows[1]:

Age Group	**Surkhab District (12 HBGS)**	**Gulistan District (13 HBGS)**	**Muslim Bagh District (5 HBGS)**	**Loralai District (10 HBGS)**	**Chagai District (14 HBGS)**	**Total By Age Group**
5-10 Years	34	54	2	52	36	**178**
10-15 Years	152	147	83	123	209	**714**
16-20 Years	37	63	20	28	47	**195**
Total per District	223	264	105	203	292	**1,087**

The vast majority of the students in grades 1-3, assuming a start at the universally accepted age of 5-6 years, should normally be in the 5-10 year old group. However, in the case of SC/US's HBGS, the vast majority of students are older. The creation of HBGS has allowed girls to enroll in school who would otherwise not have been able to access formal primary schools due to cultural habits of *purdah* and early marriage/engagement. A large number of the girls attending the HBGS would not easily fit into formal schools because of their age. SC/US is providing an important service through the HBGS by enabling girls to become involved in formal education who would otherwise be unlikely candidates for a school system where the majority of their classmates are far younger.

[1] Note that Attendance figures and Enrolment figures do not coincide precisely due to student absenteeism on the day official attendance is taken by SC/US Field Education Supervisors. At the time of the official September attendance, 1,087 or 98 percent of enrolled students were in attendance.

Enrolment Statistics

Despite the great enthusiasm and diligence of the HBGS teachers and their students, there is a dropout rate. While SC/US is concerned about this rate, it acknowledges that repatriation of refugee families, puberty and early marriage resulting in the discontinuation of education for some girls is an understandable reality of the environment in which the program runs. The latter two constraints have been reduced by the advent of HBGS and it is hoped that this trend will continue in the future as the project scales up to higher grades. The alteration of cultural attitudes towards open schooling for girls beyond puberty is not expected in the near future by the project team. However, being able to provide education to those who are motivated to continue as long as the observation of *purdah* is not disturbed is an important incentive for the continuation of this project.

HBGS enrolment for January-September 1999 is summarized as follows:

HBGS Enrolment Figures
January-September, 1999
Sch.=number of schools, Girls=enrolment

District	January		February		March		April		May		June	
	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls
Surkhab	9	179	9	179	9	179	9	179	9	179	12	227
Gulistan	10	219	10	219	10	219	10	219	13	281	13	282
Muslim Bagh	4	102	5	127	5	127	5	127	5	127	5	127
Loralai	9	173	10	198	10	198	10	198	10	198	9	188
M. Khail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chagai	14	329	14	329	14	329	14	329	14	329	14	329
Total	**46**	**1002**	**48**	**1052**	**48**	**1052**	**48**	**1052**	**51**	**1114**	**53**	**1153**

District	July		August		September	
	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls	Sch.	Girls
Surkhab	12	225	12	227	12	226
Gulistan	13	267	13	267	13	258
Muslim Bagh	5	127	5	127	5	130
Loralai	10	212	10	204	10	205
M. Khail	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chagai	14	329	14	329	14	295
Total	**54**	**1160**	**54**	**1154**	**54**	**1114**

The dropout rate over the year is difficult to tally given the changes in the number of schools over the 9 months highlighted above. Due to the creation of new schools in the first seven months of the year, the enrolment rate increased steadily during this time. However, from July-September, a dropout rate of 46 students, or 4 percent, was observed.

The summer months are normally a busy period for refugee repatriation and the project team was not particularly concerned by this development.

Challenges of the HBGS

The HBGS project has been met with great enthusiasm as a way of working with communities in which Afghan girls and women live in Balochistan's Afghan Refugee Villages. Still in its early years, the project team has faced many challenges with this work and continues to search for ways to operate in this environment. The major areas of concern facing the project are summarized as follows:

- *Teachers' Subject Knowledge:* While the project has shown that successful teachers need not be professional teachers with high levels of formal education, teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach remains a serious concern of the project team. As the schools develop further into Grade 4 and possibly beyond, teachers' abilities to understand the material they are teaching may create difficulties for both the teachers and SC/US staff. The project team hopes to experiment with providing the teachers with self-study materials in the coming months.

- *Meeting Educational Needs:* Despite the flexible way in which the HBGS operate, there is some element of rigidity in that each school only works on one grade at a time. In this way it is difficult to meet the demands being made by girls of higher or lower educational background than the school in their area. In addition, girls who do not perform well on exams have difficulty attending another school given the geographical spread of the HBGS. The intake of new students at appropriate times in the school's schedule has been discouraged in the past, but remains a demand of both the teachers and the communities. The best method by which to achieve this remains open for discussion.

- *Numbers of Schools:* SC/US currently has a list of requests for HBGS which would far exceed its goal of 60 schools if all the requests were met. Finding women who are able and willing to be teachers in these schools is presenting a challenge in some areas. While the project has shown that women with home schooling qualifications can become teachers, the key to success appears to be in the dedication and initiative of the teacher. This is not easy to find in the Balochistan Afghan RVs. SC/US also wants to avoid presenting HBGS as an alternative to its existing, and more formal, primary schools. In response to this, the HBGS team has tried to create schools which are not in close proximity to the girls' or mixed primary schools. With a small project team of only five people, the number of schools which can be adequately supported under the constraints is limited.

- *Expansion to M. Khail District:* To date, SC/US has been unsuccessful in establishing schools in the M. Khail district of Balochistan. This district, which has only 3 boys' schools, presents a formidable challenge to provision of education for boys, let alone for girls. The community's conservative and nomadic nature has meant that SC/US

has had to move carefully in bringing education to this area. In September 1999, SC/US staff visited the area to assess whether a HBGS could be established. While two potential teachers were identified and a number of boys in the schools declared that they wanted their sisters to learn as well, the majority of community elders voiced strong opinions which have limited SC/US ability to expand its work in this district at this time.

- *Dissemination:* Disseminating information about the HBGS is a formidable challenge. Men cannot visit the schools nor can the schools be videoed or photographed. This makes it difficult for outsiders to envisage activities in these schools. The ability of SC/US to conduct research on these schools is also limited by similar cultural constraints. Of utmost concern is the project's ability to maintain this vital source of education for girls and adolescents of the Afghan community.

- *Socio-Political Challenges:* SC/US has long worked with tribal, cultural, and religious norms in Balochistan's Afghan RVs. In the context of the HBGS, the project team works hard to ensure that the creation of a new school will not incite tribal or religious sensitivities in the communities. Although the conservative religious culture is well documented, the tribal culture and the challenges it presents to provision of education are less well known but equally rigorous. As such, the project team works hard to establish schools in a variety of camp areas and tries to draw students from several tribes together in the same school. In large part, due to SC/US's experience of working with these communities, the HBGS project has thus far been successfully implemented regardless of these challenges. The need to remain sensitive to these issues will strongly affect the future of the HBGS.

Current Directions

In the coming year, the SC/US aims to address many of the challenges described above. Of particular importance are the first two challenges which have implications for the scaling up of this project. SC/US will seek to meet these challenges by examining methods of decentralization, improved teacher support mechanisms, and the potential scaling up of several double-shift HBGS into formal primary schools.[2]

Those close to the project feel that the HBGS are, after three years of rapid development, sufficiently well established for the focus to be placed on issues of teaching and learning quality in order to gauge the effectiveness of these schools. As such, the project is being considered for inclusion in SC/US's implementation of the Basic Learning Competencies Initiative. (This initiative follows on from a recommendation in the 1998 UNICEF/SC/US strategy paper 'Education For Afghans'.)

[2] The concept of the Double-Shift in formal primary schools normally refers to schools with a morning and afternoon shift. In the case of the HBGS this remains the same although the second shift exists due to high demand and few accepted teachers in the program. The issue of community acceptance of scaling up into a single shift formal school has yet to be fully explored for older girls.

The employment of teachers from Quetta City to the 'near' camps (those within 1.5 hours drive of Quetta) is being considered as a way to increase the number of female teachers in the camps. While SC/US is able to identify well-qualified teachers in the city, the vast majority are unwilling to move to the camps. Whether to transport women to the RVs daily to work in the camps remains under consideration. The implications this might have for the community atmosphere surrounding SC/US's RV-based work would be of prime concern.

In conclusion, the Home Based Girls' Schools project has been rapidly integrated into SC/US work and has been met with great enthusiasm by the communities involved in them. The continued provision of this service is envisioned for as long as there are constraints on girls' participation in the more formal schools in Afghan refugee villages.

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